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THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF PAUL.

V. THE SOCIAL CONTENT OF APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY IN GENERAL.

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SECTION I. THE OPPOSITION OF APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY TO SOCIAL REVOLUTION.

THE kingdom of God, as portrayed by Jesus, involved inevitable social and political changes. However great its apocalyptic and eschatological element, one cannot fail to discover in the teaching of Jesus a distinct recognition of the ethical significance of the family, of wealth, and even of the conventionalities of life. It is special pleading to claim that his words upon such social matters were but incidental to a persistent and predominating eschatology. Throughout the Christian centuries it has been all but universally felt both in church and state that Jesus never recognized two ideal ethical codes—the one for the members of the kingdom, and the other for those who were not members. However different might have been his expectation of righteous living on the part of the one group rather than of the other, his words present social ideals for society as a whole, and not for certain of its members. The ideal may be Christian, but the moral obligation is human.⁴⁷

Yet, while thus sympathizing with the Zealots in their recognition of the regenerating effects of God's presence in human society, Jesus was quite as sensitive as any Pharisee to the dangers of social revolution. As far as possible he kept himself independent of all political agitation; the things of Cæsar were to be rendered to Cæsar; the law and the prophets were to abide until all things came to pass; the very scribes whose narrowness and pride he denounced sat in Moses' seat, and their teachings

⁴⁷ I have attempted to indicate this social content of the kingdom of God in *The Social Teaching of Jesus*.

were to be heeded. If it were not for his clear rejection of some of the very fundamentals of pharisaism—its ceremonial cleansings, its specifications concerning the sabbath, the practice of fasting, the Davidic Messiah—such conservatism might almost argue the chauvinism of the rabbis themselves. In such a case, however, neither priest nor scribe would have sought his downfall.

Yet, innovator and revolutionist as he was in the estimation of both himself and his contemporaries, he was no iconoclast. Measureless social and political results have flowed from his teachings, not because he urged the destruction of institutions, but because his principles, when once in control of social groups, by their own inherent strength have led to the recognition of rights and duties. It is no mere accident that the highest civilization is Christian. As he foretold, the fraternity Jesus inaugurated has become the leaven of society. Love has, in some degree at least, replaced violence.

It is, therefore, only what might have been expected both from the temper of Jesus and from their own insistence upon the eschatological kingdom of God, when we find the apostles possessed of a conservatism in social matters amounting almost to indifference. The early church was not a society for ethical culture, much less a society for social reform. It was a body of religionists devoted to their faith in a revealed plan of God for their salvation, who were endeavoring in an evil age to live as if citizens of heaven. As such its members at times ran dangerously near to antinomianism, and at other times to legalism, but always because of their devotion to their religious convictions. Throughout the apostolic age Christian morality was the outgrowth of religious faith, and social duties were therefore derivative rather than primary.

But morality was by no means secondary. A bad man could not be a Christian, and a Christian ought to be a good man. The prophecies had been fulfilled; the law had been superseded; the new life begotten of faith in God's love was now to be lived. Therein lay the supreme duty of the Christian while he waited for the appearance of the kingdom.

As has already appeared, Paul's position at this point is clear. Having abandoned his earlier hope of winning an acquittal at the messianic judgment by conscientious observance of the law, he would be the last man to replace the Torah with a new series of rules, either of his own devising or derived from the words of Jesus. That would be to discredit faith, and by faith, as he told the Corinthians in one of his most strenuous passages, the Christian stood.⁴⁸ As long as one was true to the faith he had professed in Jesus as the Messiah of the future kingdom, he was beyond the reach of even apostolic authority. At the same time, however, Paul gave his judgments as one who had obtained mercy of the Lord to be worthy of trust,⁴⁹ and these "judgments" may very well have been understood as authoritative advice regarding the form and direction in which the new life of the Christian should be given expression. Paul further magnified his official position in matters in which the religious element was at a minimum, and did not hesitate to deliver over to Satan an evil-doer for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.⁵⁰ None the less, however, even to the recalcitrant Corinthians he protests that he was but a master-builder who laid foundations, and that he and Apollos and Peter were but the stewards of the Christ to whom all believers belonged.⁵¹ The gospel was not a new law, and the life of faith was not to yield to a new legalism.

From this point of view one appreciates both the genetic and the fragmentary character of the apostle's teachings upon matters of conduct and social convention. They are not a new legal code, or speculations upon the social bearings of the new faith; they are solutions of definite problems with which early Christianity was confronted. As in the case of the churches of Thessalonica, Galatia, and Rome circumstances forced Paul to develop the theological content of the new messianic faith, so in the case of these and every other church to whom he addressed a letter, the necessity of actually living in accordance with such a

⁴⁸ 2 Cor. 1:24.⁴⁹ 1 Cor. 7:25.⁵⁰ 1 Cor. 5:1-5.⁵¹ 1 Cor. 3:5, 8, 23; 4:1. The entire argument as to the apostolic prerogative in 1 Corinthians is well worth consideration upon this point.

faith led him to point out the ethical and social principles it involved. Throughout his correspondence his instructions constitute less a system or program than the advice of a practical man based upon the teaching of Jesus and his own spiritual illumination.⁵² His temper of mind is the farthest possible from that of a social doctrinaire. He was not endeavoring to reform society, to legislate for all time, or to champion a paper utopia. He was simply endeavoring to make plain to men and women who had but recently shared in the practices of the heathen society of which they were still members, the lines of conduct consonant with their new life and their faith in a rapidly approaching kingdom. One may, indeed, be even more specific: his social ethics consists in directions as to how a member of a Christian church could live in the various cities of the Roman empire during the first century of our era that life which he expected to live in the coming kingdom. To understand such teaching one must understand the actual historical conditions it was intended to meet.

The problem before the student, therefore, is quite as much historical as exegetical; or, rather, just because it is exegetical it is historical, and any complete presentation of the apostolic thought must rest, not upon a collection of detached teachings, but upon a careful estimate of such teachings in the light both of the apostolic messianism and of the social environment of those to whom they were addressed.

As soon as one takes this historical point of view, one characteristic of the apostolic teaching becomes apparent. So far from resembling the efforts of many others who have attempted to induce men to adopt the same standards of life, it favored no eccentricity, it proposed no revolution. The kingdom of God, with its regenerate institutions, was in heaven and not on earth. The Pauline ethics, in so far as it concerns social relations; is always formulated with the intent of preserving Græco-Roman society as far as possible. If we except the church itself, neither Paul nor any other apostle introduced a new social institution. The early Christians, so far as we know, were born,

⁵² Cf. 1 Cor. 7:10 with 12, and see also 1 Cor. 7:25, 40.

married, toiled, and were buried as were their fellow-citizens of the empire. Thus, like his master, Paul was constantly on his guard lest his converts should mistake enthusiasm to reform other people for Christian character. Such an attitude of mind was not only the outcome of that indifference to existing evils born of his belief in the speedy coming of Christ. It was undoubtedly that in large part, but it also involved an appreciation of the actual situation in which the Christian communities found themselves. The Roman empire looked with increasing suspicion upon fraternities of all sorts—barring perhaps burial fraternities—and Paul knew only too well the danger which lay in any social extravagances. He would not even consent to destroying such conventionalities as the length of a Christian's hair, or a woman's wearing of a veil.⁵³ Above all, he tried to keep his converts free from even an appearance of social unrest. "Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called," he told the restless Corinthians. "Wast thou called being a slave? Care not for it. Was any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Hath any been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. The time is shortened, that henceforth both those that have wives may be as though they had none; and those that weep, as though they wept not; and those that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and those that buy, as though they possessed not; and those that use the world, as not using it to the full; for the fashion of this world passeth away."⁵⁴ And all apostolic teaching was to the same effect. "Let no man suffer as a meddler in other men's affairs"⁵⁵ is hardly the word of an agitator. Even when an outraged heart breaks forth in apocalyptic visions foretelling the doom of the

⁵³ I Cor. 11:14-16.

⁵⁴ I Cor. 7:18-24, 27-31. And yet PAULSEN (*Ethics*, Eng. trans., p. 66) declares that "true Christianity may always be recognized by the fact that it seems strange and dangerous to the world." See also the even more exaggerated statement of LESLIE STEPHEN, *Social Rights and Duties*, Vol. I, p. 22.

⁵⁵ I Peter 4:16.

beast whose number is 666—the Roman empire itself⁵⁶—there is no call for revolt, but rather a eulogium of the martyrs who cry to God from beneath the altar.⁵⁷

It would be a misinterpretation of early Christianity, however, if at this point we should declare with Paulsen⁵⁸ that the early Christians belittled courage and opposed aggressive struggle with enemies. Such a position has, it is true, a superficial justification in the maxims of Jesus against contests, and in the well-known willingness of the Christians to suffer martyrdom. But courage, or, better, virility, is something other than militarism, and in its moral sense is the constant watchword of the New Testament writers. "Quit yourselves like men,"⁵⁹ "fight without beating the air,"⁶⁰ "put on the whole panoply of God"⁶¹—these are certainly not the words of a man who could suffer and submit, but nothing more. The difference between the Greek and the Christian courage is not so much in the attitude of mind as in the enemies one must withstand. The Greek or Roman found his enemies in the enemies of his state; the enemies of the Christian were just as real, but they were not flesh and blood, but angels and devils and evil passions.⁶² It was against these, and not against an existing society in any of its phases, that the early Christians struggled. They could die for their faith, but they would not draw the sword for its defense. The Lord with his kingdom was at hand.

SECTION II. APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY DEVOTED NEITHER TO ASCETICISM NOR TO REFORM.

It was wholly consonant with this anti-revolutionary attitude toward society, the invariable accompaniment of apocalyptic messianism, that one chief aim of the apostolic ethics was to preserve as pure as possible the new life which had been awakened in the Christian. As may well be imagined, innumerable

⁵⁶CLEMEN, "Die Zahl des Tieres, Apc. 13:18," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1901, pp. 109–14. For a curious error in this article, which, however, hardly affects its main position, see BIBLICAL WORLD, Vol. XVIII (1901), p. 76.

⁵⁷ Rev. 6:9; 13:18.

⁵⁹ 1 Cor. 16:13.

⁶¹ Eph. 6:11 f.

⁵⁸ *Ethics*, Eng. trans., pp. 69 f.

⁶⁰ 1 Cor. 9:26.

⁶² Eph. 6:12.

dangers threatened Christian morality from its social environment. Græco-Roman civilization in Paul's day had not, it is true, reached its period of decadence, nor were its morals quite as dark as Seneca and the satirists would have one believe; yet it was by no means calculated to help one live the life of the spirit. Animalism was either magnified or treated as morally neutral by men not at all vicious, and in every city the masses almost inevitably grew debased. Today's society threatens strikingly similar dangers to Christian idealism, but never were programs more opposed than that of the twentieth-century reformer and that of the apostles. The modern reformer endeavors to make honesty, purity, and other Christian virtues more easily realizable by changing the social environment in which men struggle. As Jesus might have said, he seeks to increase the harvest by improving the earth in which the seed of the kingdom is planted. But this recourse to a regenerated society as an aid to the individual Christian, Paul and the other apostles never made. No one of them ever proposed to make Christian morality more practicable through the destruction of the evils to which it was exposed. There was to be no compromise with the world, but neither was the world to be converted.

Yet asceticism, the last resource of pessimistic righteousness, was never urged upon the struggling Christian communities. It is, indeed, rather common to find the opposite asserted,⁶³ but at the expense either of a definition of asceticism or of a true exposition of Pauline thought. The point of view of the apostles was not that of those who regard misery as the royal road to holiness, or of those who would have men leave social life in order to live to God; but rather that of those who have adopted a new standard of values. For them that alone in life is of importance which was to extend over into the heavenly kingdom. The application of such a standard will give results which superficially resemble asceticism, but which are really nothing of the sort. For instance, it is not an injunction to asceticism to tell a person who knows the moral impulses that come from religious

⁶³So, for instance, by PAULSEN, *Ethics*, Eng. trans., pp. 91 f., and THILLY, *Introduction to Ethics*, p. 190, note.

experiences and whose highest ethical imperative is "whereunto you have already attained by that same standard walk," that there are distractions in marriage, and that, since the Lord is soon to appear and to end the marriage relation, one had better choose a life in which he can more completely and easily devote himself to moral endeavor.⁶⁴ Asceticism would say that marriage is contaminating, or that there is merit in celibacy, and such opinions neither Paul nor any apostle to our knowledge ever held.⁶⁵ The insistence of Jesus upon the necessity of his disciples remaining in the world rather than becoming recluses or monks is echoed repeatedly in Paul. In fact, as will appear in our discussion of the apostolic teaching as to social life, he is insistently opposed to anything that would detract from neighborliness or the legitimate enjoyments of those whose Master both in words and practice had rejected asceticism.

It is the same standard of values that explains the indifference of the earlier interpreters of Jesus to social evils like slavery and prostitution. Jesus had indeed said nothing directly against either evil, but it is clear that the man who would love his neighbor as himself could not long endure to see his neighbor either a slave or a prostitute, and, as Christian history shows abundantly, must endeavor to end both institutions by law. We should have expected that an apostle would have been as eager for such reforms as a modern philanthropist, and, as will presently appear, within the limits of the Christian community itself equality and social purity were unceasingly, passionately urged; but in all the apostolic literature both slavery and prostitution are accepted as abiding elements in a wicked world. They would perish only with the age. There is no more striking picture of a radical submitting to a social evil he saw was incompatible with his own ideals than that furnished in the little letter of Paul to Philemon in which the apostle recounts how, as one result of having converted his friend's runaway

⁶⁴1 Cor. 7 : 29, 31, 32.

⁶⁵ While we cannot deny that Paul regards the unmarried state as superior to the married, the entire discussion contained in 1 Cor., chap. 7, will dispossess a fair mind of any predisposition to discover within it genuine asceticism.

slave Onesimus, he was sending him back to a slavery from which he had safely escaped. Paul has, indeed, many words of counsel and exhortation for both master and slaves. The master is not to threaten his slaves, since they both have one Master with whom there is no respect of persons,⁶⁶ and he is to treat them with justice and equality.⁶⁷ Directions for the conduct of slaves are also numerous, as one might expect, but all to the same effect. Slaves are to be⁶⁸ obedient, as servants of Christ. A position in which a man was both a slave and a brother was certainly anomalous, and, had it not been for the hope that the new age with its readjustments was close at hand, unendurable. Some slaves must have seen this, as possibly the runaway Onesimus; but more certainly those Christian slaves who, as we know from 1 Tim. 6:1, were tempted to look with contempt upon a Christian master who did not emancipate them.

That, notwithstanding his refusal even to hint at emancipation, Paul could also write that "*in Christ* there is neither bond nor free"⁶⁹ shows the difference between the standards when applied to the coming kingdom and when applied to the age that was to end within the lifetime, possibly, of the slave himself. That the two conceptions did not affect one another is the clearest possible evidence of the failure of Paul to see the social bearing of Christianity.

The attitude of Paul toward prostitution and other evils which depended upon sin rather than upon misfortune and law is not radically different from that displayed toward slavery, though no fornicator was to be permitted to live within the Christian community or could hope to enter the kingdom of God.⁷⁰ Yet, so far as we know, no effort was made by the apostolic church to reduce or control prostitution and other vices by law, or in any way except by the conversion of the evil-doers themselves. Apostolic Christianity at this point was thoroughly individualistic. The Christian as such was to be chaste; society would always be licentious. Paul expressly implies that prosti-

⁶⁶ Eph. 6:9.⁶⁷ Col. 4:1.⁶⁸ Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22; Tit. 2:9; 1 Pet. 2:18.⁶⁹ Gal. 3:28.⁷⁰ 1 Cor. 6:9.

tution is a permanent factor of un-Christian society, and that it is impossible for the Christian, in Corinth at least, to avoid associating with fornicators. In such a case he must needs go out of the world—a saying which marks the nearest approach to cynicism contained in apostolic literature.⁷¹

One thing, however, must be added. If apostolic Christianity, because of its anticipation of the speedy return of its Lord, felt no responsibility for establishing a Christian civilization, it most emphatically did feel the responsibility of treating all men, whether or not of the household of faith, with self-sacrificing love. The apostolic literature abounds in exhortations to treat all men in the spirit of Christ. "Avenge not yourselves, beloved," says Paul to the Romans,⁷² "but give place unto the wrath of God; for it is written, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord. But if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." And to the Galatians⁷³ he wrote: "Let us work that which is good toward all men." With humanity once possessed of such a spirit, the new age would indeed have dawned.

The fact is, however, that the great mass of the Pauline teaching regarding social relations concerns the church and its members rather than society at large. The ethical and social teachings of Paul would have been almost meaningless to any but those who shared in his faith. A Christian society was evidently expected by him to result from the segregation of Christians, rather than from the transformation of an empire. Christian civilization, paradoxically enough, was a by-product of apostolic Christianity. How far Paul was dominated by the conception of the church as the only social group with whose conduct and conventions he had an immediate concern will appear as we proceed to consider his more specific social teachings.

⁷¹ 1 Cor. 5 : 9, 10.

⁷² Rom. 12 : 19-21.

⁷³ 6 : 10.